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The explosion of knowledge, the development of technology, the increasing demand of minority groups for equal opportunity, and the growing importance of education to each individual and to society--all these affect the role of the teacher. His central role remains that of the stimulator of learning for individuals and groups. Teacher educators and school administrators must work even more closely together in preparing him for work with the disadvantaged, and schools must free him to teach by having auxiliary personnel and equipment to assume the nonteaching duties. But a teacher's role is more than that of stimulator of learning. He is also (1) a member of the teaching profession who shares his thinking and experience with others to promote the interests of education and of teachers, (2) a contributor to the formulation of educational policy who recognizes that the ultimate control of education is justly and legally a public function, and (3) a citizen of a community who exercises his right to influence public policies, thus setting an example for pupils. Teacher educators, leaders of teacher organizations, school administrators, and legislators must all recognize these diverse roles of the teacher, must better prepare him for all 4 of the roles, and must facilitate his functions, particularly in the newly emerging roles. (JS)

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On the Role of the Teacher

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Introduction

Among the most important changes in American life that affect education are the explosion of knowledge, the development of technology, the increasing demand of minority groups for equal opportunity, and the growing importance of education to each individual and to society. These changes in turn affect the role of the central professional person in the educational enterprise — the teacher. The Educational Policies Commission believes that the role of the teacher needs to be examined in the light of these changing circumstances. The Commission therefore offers this statement on some aspects of these changes and proposes to continue to examine their implications in the future.

The central role of the teacher remains the stimulation of learning for individuals and for groups. The essence of this process lies in face-to-face relationships with students. Any teacher has many other roles as well, because he can do much outside his classroom to increase the possibility of successful teaching. Thus, he is a member of the teaching profession, a contributor to the formulation of educational policy, and a citizen of a community. We shall discuss all these roles. But his main function remains what it has always been — to teach.

Stimulator of Learning

It is sometimes said that anyone can teach. Even parents who have difficulty managing the affairs of three or four children often expect teachers to work easily and effectively with thirty or more. Teachers, who live day-to-day with the extraordinary complexities of the learning process, are understandably bewildered that the management of this process could be thought simple.

Through centuries of experience, educators have acquired certain insights about learning. There are many disagreements about some aspects of the learning process, but there is general agreement on several principles, all of them simple to state but extraordinarily difficult to apply:

1. *Learning is an act of a learner, not of a teacher.*

In a learning situation it is the interaction in a learner of internal and external stimuli which is of central and final importance. The object of a learning experience is intellectual change, not any particular or predetermined set of machinations performed by a teacher.

This insight would seem self-evident; yet the history of education has seen it more ignored than honored. Education should be viewed as the provision of conditions in which pupils

will be motivated from within to respond and develop, but it has been much easier to conceive of it as a series of external demands upon children for externally desired responses.

Teachers generally are aware – perhaps painfully so – that all learning must be done by a learner. The best-conceived lesson plan, the deepest knowledge of one's subject, and the most skillful use of teaching techniques are of no avail unless each learner reacts, and reacts in a way that furthers the development of his innate capacities.

2. *A learner learns when he makes responses.*

Learning may be defined as responses which change a learner by reinforcing or modifying habits, skills, beliefs, attitudes, or knowledge. Responses can be overt and observable, or they can be imperceptible to an observer. Responses can be conscious and firmly in the forefront of a learner's awareness, or they can escape his awareness. Responses can derive directly from stimuli externally applied, perhaps by a teacher, or they can flow from internal stimuli set off by introspective thinking. The responses and the stimuli can occur close together in time or be separated by a long period of inattention. But whatever the type or mixture of types of response, it is always in responding that a learner learns.

3. *What he learns is the total response he makes.*

Responses seldom come singly or in isolated bundles. In a teaching situation, a teacher may elicit a particular kind of response from a learner, but rarely is such a response the only response which takes place. An array of related responses, perhaps tied to one another by associations built up in the learner's mind, usually provides the basis for learning. The array of responses may touch off a process of contemplation, which provides further responses. The responses which are derived in all these ways are collectively that which is learned. Thus, from a given experience, a pupil may learn the specific things his teacher wants

him to learn, but he may also learn to like or dislike the teacher, the subject, or himself. Any or all of these responses may trigger further reactions of an intellectual or emotional nature.

Thus, learning is likely to be complex. A student who learns a French word may be learning, too, that French is beautiful or ugly, that words are arbitrary symbols, and that languages are fun or hard to learn. A pupil who reads the Declaration of Independence may learn from it something of enduring importance, or he may be merely bored. He may also grasp the power of literature, or he may learn that history is something to be studied only to avoid the teacher's ire or a failing mark. A child who learns correct grammar may learn much more in the process. He may learn that his parents' speech is scorned, that school is irrelevant to him, or that proper speech is necessary to get ahead. These learnings could have a greater impact on his subsequent education and life than the specific learning intended, and perhaps not all of what he learns will be beneficial.

4. *A learner responds on his own terms.*

Every learner approaches each learning situation very much a prisoner of his own past learnings. He is capable of responding to a situation only as he sees it and as he senses it. He does not, merely on command, develop internal motivation to work at an activity or to learn a subject. Thus his response in any situation is uniquely his own. It is not easily predicted by another person, yet to the teacher it is all that matters.

In order to have some reliable basis for helping the child, the teacher must be able to create an environment in which the given child feels at home and wants to grow. He must also be able to provide specific opportunities for responding which matter to the child and which elicit development of the child's potentials.

To be in a position to provide conditions appropriate to each child requires some understanding of each child. That under-

standing can never approach completeness because the amount of relevant information – about the child's health, emotional stability, family, friends, social class, religion, vocabulary, concept of self, and many other things – is overwhelming. Moreover, the relevance of much of it is only dimly perceived. But a teacher who tries to understand a child's background improves his chances of providing appropriate learning experiences. The effort to understand a child is dangerous only if the teacher is too sure of his conclusions; if he uses his "understanding" to explain away any failures he may have in teaching a given child; or if he diagnoses and treats students' individualities too much in terms of categorized explanations and remedies.

5. *Learning responses can be repressed or enhanced.*

The sorts of responses which produce learning are most likely to be elicited when a learner feels a reasonable, but not total, safety. To express it in the converse, such responses are likely to be repressed in a situation in which a learner either does not feel safe or is complacent. For example, if a child fails much of the time or succeeds too easily, the program is ill-adapted to his maximum progress. There should be a fair balance between reasonable safety and challenge – any child should be able to feel the encouragement he receives from the praise of others and the satisfaction which comes from stretching his capacities a little further.

6. *Teaching consists of creating circumstances in which learners can make learning responses.*

The teaching act consists of making decisions regarding the experiences which are to occur in the life of a learner in order to help him make responses from which he will learn things which are thought to be worth his learning. The essence of teaching is, therefore, in the making of decisions. These decisions can be made in advance or on the spot. A teacher's problem is to make

decisions which seem to be consistent with the pupil as he is and which will offer him an opportunity to advance his learning.

Much good decision making can be based on information gathered in classrooms by observing the responses of pupils. Whether useful responses on the part of the pupil do or do not result is usually observable. Good teachers look for these evidences and adapt their procedures to that search.

If many decisions must be made on the spot, others – called "lesson plans," "textbooks," "syllabuses," and "curriculum" – are made ahead of time. No activity prepared in advance, however, can be expected to have equal meaning or benefit for all pupils. Each pupil can respond to an experience only in terms of his own background; and common experiences will therefore produce varied responses and varied learnings. A wise teacher looks on any previously made plan or syllabus as merely a starting point from which he expects to vary flexibly from moment to moment and pupil to pupil. For excellence in teaching, the decisions the teacher makes from moment to moment face-to-face with pupils in the classroom are of crucial importance.

In making these plans and adjustments to plans, teachers should consult their learners and ask them to participate, singly and in groups, in planning. Partly, this consultation is motivated by a sense of the fitness of things. If a plan is to be used by a child, he is entitled to participate in making it. It is also motivated by a need for efficiency. Since the purpose of any such plan is to elicit responses from a child, it is more likely to be a good plan if the child has participated in the making of it, for he will have shown something of the basis from which he might respond.

In applying his knowledge of the learning process, a good teacher –

1. Is motivated by a deep sense that every pupil is endowed with great human dignity and great potential. He knows that a

teacher's respect for each pupil is vital, in particular at the elementary and secondary school levels, if pupils are to maintain the sense of security and self-confidence on which healthy learning is based.

2. Is determined that every pupil shall benefit from school. He recognizes that each pupil, including those who seem likely to drop out early, must find school a congenial place and must experience excitement and joy in learning. Even more important, he recognizes that each pupil must see the relevance of school to his own life and time.

3. Does not feel threatened in his own integrity by unconventional or disruptive behavior of pupils. He knows that people are willing to work hard and respectfully at tasks which matter to them.

4. Views himself more as a stimulator and assistant of inquiry than as the dispenser of knowledge, truth, and wisdom. He is motivated in this by his recognition of the uncertainty of all present knowledge, including his own; the realization that dispensing is poor teaching; and the need to exemplify for pupils the search for understanding and knowledge.

5. Takes advantage of the full extent of his professional freedom and observes the limits imposed by public policy on that freedom. The teacher knows, before he is employed, the ground rules of his employment. When he has completed his district's probationary period, he has the professional right and responsibility, within the limits of those ground rules, to choose the methods and procedures he considers best. He is prepared to defend rationally any procedure or method he chooses to use and any other decision he makes in his teaching. If he gives what he believes to be ample reason for a decision and is overruled, he has a channel of appeal. He also has channels through which to try to effect changes in the ground rules.

6. Constantly seeks self-improvement, in particular keeping abreast of advances in the behavioral sciences and in the subject matter areas with which he is primarily concerned as a teacher. Whatever the age or background of his pupils, he recognizes the need to be up-to-date if he is to be relevant to them and to convey a valid picture of the world. In addition, he knows that exemplifying the spirit of inquiry is part of directing the learning process well. He can communicate the excitement of learning because he lives that excitement.

7. Seeks, evaluates, and appropriately and creatively uses new teaching methods and technological devices. In stimulating learning he is likely to work with other adults and with machines to a far greater extent than did teachers even in the recent past.

Attitudes are basic to virtually all these qualifications for directing the learning process. Indeed, some of the qualifications *are* attitudes. Where the needed attitudes do not exist, the fault may lie in all places where attitudes are developed and influenced — family life, community, all the circumstances in the life of the future or present teacher.

Perhaps the most common failing, from the viewpoint of effectiveness in teaching, is a lack of respect for certain pupils, particularly those called "disadvantaged." When a teacher does not respect a pupil, his effectiveness with that pupil is impaired or even destroyed, except in teaching a hatred or fear of school and learning. Unfortunately, this situation most often occurs in the case of the very pupils who most desperately need the schools' help. Children whose cultural background handicaps them in the modern world also have special difficulties in school. They do not behave or speak in traditionally expected ways, and they do not respond easily to traditional school programs. A teacher who fails to treat them with respect will probably never discover — or help them to discover — that they have the same range of capacities as pupils from any other background. Most chil-

dren sense whether adults respect them or not. If the children do not sense respect, they suffer in their sense of security and self-confidence, and they therefore learn poorly. The teacher involved then feels confirmed in his low respect for their human worth. He is unlikely to be motivated by a determination that those pupils shall benefit from school.

This problem exists for the most part between teachers and disadvantaged children. A major hope for preventing this incompatibility obviously lies in improved teacher education. Teacher education today is increasingly recognizing this need and is developing increasing sophistication in meeting it. Successful programs seem generally to provide considerable experience in working with disadvantaged students and considerable knowledge of teaching approaches that have proved useful. Confidence that one can succeed stimulates respect for one's pupils and a desire to succeed.

While teacher educators have been developing further their programs to prepare teachers for work with the disadvantaged, administrators and supervisors in urban schools have been attempting to help teachers in service. It is a hard job to bring children into a culture which is not their own. Teachers who attempt to do it need help, and every possible indication of concern, from their administrators.

It may well be that the problem of educating disadvantaged persons is insoluble in segregated situations. However, we are convinced that the problem is insoluble without respect and desire to succeed on the part of the teachers.

For years, teacher education has emphasized the major principles of learning. Some teachers, however, fail to apply them. Many of the violations of principles of learning go back to causes predating a teacher's college years. A person too insecure to tolerate a teaching situation over which he does not have total control is reluctant to promote a free-ranging spirit of inquiry in

his class. A person who, as a pupil, always experienced teaching as the dispensing of knowledge cannot easily break free and work by some other conception of teaching. A person who is not himself motivated by a restless sense of curiosity finds other uses of his time more important to him than seeking new knowledge, understanding, and competence in teaching.

It is difficult in adulthood to eliminate these characteristics that hamper teaching, but there are hopeful approaches. Teachers who can relate the possibilities of change to their actual experiences and problems are more susceptible to being impressed by those possibilities than are persons who have not yet taught. By developing an ever closer relationship with in-service programs for teachers, the schools of education may be able to perform one of their most useful services.

The problem of freedom to teach has many facets. Many teachers cannot exercise their freedom to teach creatively because of the many time-consuming nonteaching duties with which they are burdened. Many teachers, desiring the psychological security of a job surrounded by specific traditions, regulations, and directions, do not utilize the freedom of action which is theirs for the taking. In other cases, school administrators, school boards, and state legislatures insist on regulating the details of teaching in a manner prejudicial to teacher creativity.

The remedies suggest themselves. If teachers are to devote most of their time to teaching, schools must have auxiliary personnel and equipment to assume the various nonteaching duties. If teachers are to utilize the freedom of action that is at their disposal today, teacher educators must make them aware of the need to do so and school administrators must encourage and protect them when they try. If administrators, school boards, and legislatures do not recognize the importance of freeing teachers to be creative, teacher associations must apprise them of the need and must seek to bring about a change.

Member of the Teaching Profession

The teacher depends on the help of others for a host of his requirements, from buildings and salaries to professional preparation and specialized assistance. Good teaching requires the ability to take advantage of the professional assistance that is available. A large part of good administration is the ability to mobilize the resources that support teachers and to assist teachers in putting them to good use.

To improve his competence a teacher can turn to workshops, courses, the constructive advice of colleagues, procedures for analyzing his own teaching, and a growing variety of teaching and learning technology. For attainment of the working conditions and salaries that good teaching requires and deserves, he must work with his professional organizations. For specialized assistance with classroom problems, he can turn to his curriculum specialists, principal, librarian, speech therapist, or psychiatrist. For new ideas and for refinement of his own, he can engage in discussions with other teachers.

As a member of the teaching profession, a teacher —

1. Shares his thinking and experience with his colleagues, recognizing in this regard a particular obligation to newcomers

2. Tries to benefit from the thinking and experience of his colleagues

3. Develops his own conception of where group efforts are appropriate and necessary

4. Belongs to local, state, and/or national organizations of teachers if he believes that they do or can promote the interests of education and of teachers

5. Plays an active role in shaping those organizations and in contributing to those activities which he considers beneficial to education and to teachers

6. Has a commitment to the achievement of the salaries, working conditions, and other policies he believes necessary for the improvement of education, motivating and moderating each action by an effort to make the interests of teachers consistent with the interests of pupils.

Some teachers lack the time or interest to participate in group activities that would advance the cause of education or even improve their own teaching. Historically, a teacher's role has largely been limited to direction of the learning process in the classroom. This remains a teacher's central role today. Although teachers are increasingly aware that they can play another important role in improvement of the learning process if they engage in professional activities outside the classroom as well, many teachers continue to show little awareness of this connection. They may ignore their colleagues and live an isolated professional life. They may fail to join any professional organization, not because they have thoughtfully evaluated the place of group effort but because they are basically uninterested. They may join a professional organization, but may limit their participation to the paying of the annual dues. They may be interested in professional activities, but only for purposes of achieving publicity or personal power.

Teacher education should do more to make teachers aware of the impact that extra-classroom professional activities can have on their success in the classroom. School administrators should encourage the participation of teachers in such activities. But teacher educators and administrators must not dictate the organizational activities of teachers. They should encourage and help teachers to think seriously about the proper place of group activities and to draw their own conclusions.

Sometimes teachers organizations themselves are at fault. Many are so out of touch with the concerns of the teachers they purport to serve that they do not deserve the respect of teachers. A conscientious teacher would join such an organization only in order to revolutionize it; and few teachers have the time, or see much hope, for accomplishing a revolution. Without teachers who are willing and able to fight for a change, little can be done in these situations.

School administrators should encourage classroom teachers to share ideas and to consider in particular what they might do to help newcomers to the faculty. Not only can teachers often profit from the specific ideas and suggestions of their colleagues, but also an atmosphere of fellowship in a school is conducive to good teaching.

Teachers could be most helpful in improving teacher education. In the matter of their preparation for teaching, many teachers tend more to complain to each other and to other citizens than to present their suggestions where they might do some good. This problem could be countered if teacher education institutions were to consider their alumni to be their best resources for improvement and were regularly to request both criticism and suggestions.

Contributor to the Formulation of Educational Policy

Of all the roles a teacher has, this is probably the one which is growing fastest. It is growing because of a spreading recognition that teachers have a peculiarly good vantage point for judging the wisdom of much educational policy. Each teacher lives with the effects of educational policy at the point where the payoff of public educational efforts is focused. It is therefore wise for teachers to have an important say in developing policy, though it must be recognized at all times that the ultimate control of education is justly and legally a public function.

A conscientious teacher —

1. Works for and participates in channels to influence the making of policy at the level of the school, the school district, the state, and the nation. He influences policy relating to such matters as curriculum, materials, organization of services to teachers, financial support, composition of the student body, and the proper extent of teachers' freedom of action and decision.

2. Is motivated in these pursuits by a desire to improve education through contributing to the policy development process his special knowledge of school needs. At the same time, he recognizes that the purposes and financing of education are properly

decided by the people as a whole and that persons appointed by and responsible to the school board have specialized responsibilities in the administration of education.

Again, major obstacles to teacher participation in the formulation of educational policy are lack of time and lack of a concept of teaching which includes this function. In the first case, the employment of auxiliary personnel will help. In the second case, teacher education can provoke thought in all future teachers about the role that they might play in policy development. In both cases, encouragement by administrators can have considerable impact. In all cases, dictatorial or paternalistic school boards and school administrations, which are still fairly common, are to be condemned.

Sometimes, the problem is just the reverse. Teachers demand a voice in policy formulation which would virtually deprive the school board of its rightful ultimate authority over policy. Occasionally, they fail to recognize that the principal or superintendent is located at a vantage point just as worthy of respect as their own. In these cases, they may try to eliminate their administrator from a major role in policy development or implementation, not because they deem him personally to be unworthy, but because they regard administrators as their enemies on principle.

Teacher educators and leaders of teachers organizations should encourage teachers to ponder deeply the various functions required to operate the education enterprise.

Citizen of a Community

It was long thought that a teacher should exemplify the moral virtues admired by the community which he serves. In particular, he was to exemplify personal virtues such as chastity, charity, abstention from alcohol, and simplicity in dress. Today, people tend to be more tolerant of teachers who, in these matters, live by the community's mores rather than by its cliches. Civic virtues, on the other hand, are coming to the fore, in the expectations of teachers and in the permission of communities.

As a conscientious citizen, a teacher —

1. Works individually and with others to influence the public toward policies and toward a level of financial support which he believes would improve education

2. Works for a healthier community, for he recognizes the impact of conditions in the community on the accomplishments which the schools can aspire to

3. Recognizes the educational impact of many forces outside the school, takes account of them in his teaching, and uses his rights as a citizen to influence them

4. Demands and exercises his right to take a stand, including a dissenting stand, on great public issues, thus setting an example for pupils.

Some communities prohibit teachers from exercising their rights as citizens. Teachers associations should work to remedy these situations, paying due attention to the just concern that no grounds be given to doubt the objectivity of teachers or their competence to serve equally all the students in the community.

Many teachers either fail to recognize the impact of community conditions on their teaching or feel helpless to alter those conditions. A primary objective of teacher education, both pre- and in-service, should be to develop a perception of the connection between community and classroom, in practice as well as in the abstract. Teachers should also be acquainted with examples in which teachers, by joint action, have affected communities significantly.

Conclusion

In a sense, those who believe that anyone can teach are right. Anyone *can* teach — poorly. But the qualifications of a good teacher are those of an exceptional person. He must be motivated by the highest principles, and in particular by a deep desire to bring out the potentials which he knows to be in every human being. He must have a strength of character which permits him to live with constant challenge and uncertainty and to fight for those conditions in the school and community which he considers essential to good teaching. He must be gifted in working with both individuals and groups, whether pupils or professional colleagues or fellow citizens. He must possess an inquiring intellect and must try to keep abreast in particular of advances in the sciences relevant to all teaching and in the subjects which he teaches.

Of course, not everyone who is certified and paid to teach is a true teacher. But true teaching is perhaps the most complex of all professions, and in nobility of purpose it is second to none. One does not become rich by teaching; but who has more reason than a true teacher to rest assured that the world is a better place because of him, with no possibility of predicting where his influence will end?

The recommendations in this publication are those of the Educational Policies Commission, a commission of the National Education Association of the United States and the American Association of School Administrators. Publication in this form does not constitute formal approval by the sponsoring associations.